N° X.

THE THEATRICAL CENSOR.

BY A CITIZEN.

Est modus in rebus.—*There's reason in roasting of eggs.*—HOR.

Friday Evening, Jan. 24.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

MR. FENNELL's *Penruddock* was extremely chaste. With the exception of *Zanga*, it was, in our opinion, his best performance this season. Mr. Cain, in this play, exceeded our utmost expectation. Were this gentleman to confine himself, as we have before observed, to sentimental comedy, he would generally please; but when he attempts to soar above it, his feeble pinions refuse their office.

Monday Evening, Jan. 27.

MACBETH.

IT may not yet be too late in the day, to offer some observations on the intrinsic merits of this admired and popular tragedy. It is one of those valuable dramas in which the beauty consists less in the development of a plot than that of a character; and though *Macbeth* is far from drawn with that nicety of outline which sets *Hamlet*, perhaps, above all competition, yet its strokes are distinct and masterly. It is also worthy of remark, that our esteem of the previous dispositions of the murderer is never raised by expressions of his own self-esteem; but always by the testimony of others, given on the most natural occasions. How fine is the eulogium passed upon him by *Lady Macbeth!*

—Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way: Thou would'st be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
That thou would'st holily;—

and in how few words are we made acquainted with a man of unfixed principle, and thus prepared for all that is to follow!

——Would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win: thou 'd'st have, great Glamis,
That which cries, Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone.

We have here a description of those who form the majority of mankind; in *Macbeth*, therefore, the stage emphatically calls upon the spectators, *Veluti in speculô*, to behold themselves as in a mirror; and bids them feel in unison with the sentiment of *Calista*, satirically entertained of her who is more fortunate than sure-footed, and—

Blesses her *good stars* that she is virtuous.

To the age in which *Macbeth* was written it held up a lesson, temporary, but high, and awful. This was nothing less than a caution of the last importance against the effects of those insidious machinations of the devil, supposed to be employed against mankind through immediate ministers on earth. It was about this time, that king James the First wrote his *Demonology;* and witches and demons were now in full credit, among minds under the dominion of vulgar prejudices. Under these circumstances, SHAKESPEAR may be regarded as employing his great talents, for the purpose, if not of discrediting the doctrine, at least of chastising its effects: for it is ever the malignant property of superstition, to dispose, at its will, of the consciences of men. In this point of view, *Hamlet* may be considered as a counterpart of *Macbeth;* we see in the first, a man scrupulously careful of *imposition;* and in the second, the consequences of a too ready appetite for the bait. Persons exposed to these temptations must have received the most salutary instruction from the argument of *Macbeth:*

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good: If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing with a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth infix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?

and from this precept, drawn from the catastrophe, and given by one who is the victim of the illusions he deprecates:

And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to the ear,
And break it to our hope.

This "paltering in a double sense," has been complained of in all jugglers, from the pythonesses of Delphi, to the fortune-tellers of our own day. It is a happy contrivance for, at once, concealing their ignorance and preserving their reputation.

But these "solicitings" and "suggestions" are felt by those who have at the same time but little faith in the "weird sisters;" and, hence, *Macbeth* conveys a moral, unconfined to any time or country. We have an impressive picture in the sight of the "brave *Macbeth*," brought at length to say,—

For my own good
All causes shall give way; I am in blood
Stept in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

In speaking of the representation of this evening, it will be expected that we should give our first attention to Mr. F.'s performance; but we must frankly confess that other and subordinate parts of the piece have made a stronger impression on our mind. Mr. Fennell disappointed us. We do not say that he committed gross errors, or, perhaps, in any instance shocked our understanding; and even this, comparatively speaking, is considerable praise; but, from Mr. F. we had expected something more. Toward the conclusion, he certainly rose with the scene; but let it be remembered that the merits displayed here are rather of the class that belong to *action*, than to a delicate feeling of the text. In the Dagger soliloquy, he had a field for the latter; and we derived some real gratification; though we cannot allow that he approached very near to perfection; and he failed in filling the imagination of the audience with—

Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going;—

for, had he gone that way, it must have been by an oblique cut, across the pit. We remember with pleasure, his—

But no more sights!

and we wish that he had stored our minds with a long list of similar beauties. We repeat it, he was almost always respectable; but we had hoped to have been enabled to speak in higher terms.

In the passage—

> *Macbeth*. Your *children* shall be KINGS.
> *Banquo*. *You* shall be KING.

Mr. F. reads,—

> Your children *shall* be kings;

but there is certainly no necessity for marking the *future* reference of a prediction; and the sense requires the emphasis to be laid as we have marked it.

Mrs. Melmoth divided our praise with Mr. Fennell. She was very excellent throughout a great proportion of her part; but, at times, she seemed to forget the dignity and severe character of *Lady Macbeth*. In the Banquet Scene she was far from speaking *aside*, to her distracted husband. In reading the letter, we could perceive but little nature. She gave a very wrong expression to "Hail, king that shalt be." She read "*messives*," as if she meant to give us a mongrel word, between "missives" and "messengers." In the seventh scene, we could almost have supposed that she designed to burlesque the speeches beginning, "Was the hope drunk," and, "What beast was't then, that made you break this enterprise to me?"

If the *Ghost of Banquo* be to enter, we are persuaded that it would produce a very fine effect, were the dress he wears, while alive, exchanged for one of a dye several shades lighter, but in all other respects precisely similar. Even the hair of the actor should not be forgotten. The figure thus etherialized, would form, with the living persons, a contrast that could not but affect every one's imagination. But, in truth, we think that this impression would be greatest, were the *Ghost* not present at all; especially on the second occasion, when *Macbeth* exclaims,—

> Hence, horrible shadow!
> Unreal mockery, hence!—Why so;—being gone,
> I am a man again.

No language could come better from a man shaking off a phantasy of the mind, an "unreal mockery;" while, on the other hand, it is extremely revolting to see a *real* ghost *exit* when it is bidden.

There is an undeniable error in the arrangement of this scene. If the king and his consort be to be fed upon high chairs, then at least the *Ghost* should seat himself in one of them. He ought, by all means, to sit in *Macbeth's* place:

——— The times have been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now, they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools.

Besides, *Banquo's* seating himself in the royal chair would afford an elegant allusion to the destiny of his children; a subject which torments *Macbeth*, and which is a principal motive for the intended murder, both of himself and *Fleance*:

He chid the sisters,
When first they put the name of King upon me,
And bade them speak to Him; then, prophet-like,
They hail'd Him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they plac'd a fruitles crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If it be so,
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make Them kings, the Seed of Banquo kings!

But, without reference to the deeper meanings of the text, is it not ridiculous, in the eye of every spectator, to hear *Macbeth* assert,

The table's full,

while (that occupied by the *Ghost* being counted for one) there are two chairs empty? we say two, because we presume that *Lady Macbeth* is considered to be at table; though it is indeed very true, that when sovereigns condescend to "hold solemn suppers," they also condescend to place themselves within reach of their plates, and do not sit between two tables, and thus, in the very spirit of the proverb, get no meal at all. If the steps upon which stand the chairs of *Macbeth* and his lady be meant for the *haut-pas* of a royal banqueting-room, the *property-man* is entirely in the wrong. The royal table should stand upon it; and the guests admitted to that table should sit on the same level with the sovereign. This is matter of

fact; but, if the reader wish to have poetical authority, why, take it:

'Twas at the royal feast for Persia won,
By Philip's warlike son:
His valiant peers *were plac'd around*,
Their brows with wreaths of roses, and of myrtle, crown'd.

The better plan, therefore, would be, to lay only one table, placed in the same direction as those of this evening; that is, running from near the front to the back of the stage. At the mid-length of this table, on the left hand of the audience, should be set the royal chairs. The "good peers," not excluding the peeresses, should sit on the right and left of these chairs, and lady Macbeth occupy the left chair. That on the right, designed for the king, would thus be nearest to the audience, and it is in this which the ghost of Banquo should sit, or be supposed to sit. It would be best, that the attendants should wait on the right, that is in the front, of the table; and, to render the scene more complete, a second table might stretch across the width of the stage, at the back.

We must do the manager the credit to say that this tragedy has been *got up* with great attention on his part. The apparitions of the Eight Kings were dressed, and contrived, in a manner truly admirable; but they did not all, "come like shadows, so depart." Their procession was any thing but regular. One of them actually took a skip. It would be a commendable novelty, if, on a future occasion, the Armed Head, &c. rose more in the back of the scene. These latter apparitions are always stumbling-blocks in the representation; and it would be policy not to expose them so much to view. It were desirable that a somewhat graver bell sounded, when Macbeth remarks upon it,

Hear it not, Duncan! for it is a knell
That summons thee to heav'n, or to hell.

The knocking at the stage-door, instead of the outer gate, was very wrong.

The whole of the scenery and dresses is good; and the choruses of witches gratified us extremely. The ascent of Hecate deserves much praise. Mr. Jefferson, as First Witch, won our warm applause. Mr. Blisset's *carl*dron was not exactly to our taste; but his,

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes,

was highly characteristic. Our commendation is due to the trio; we do not believe that we ever saw the parts better performed; but we are nevertheless of opinion that they admit a still higher degree of excellence: more nature, more mystery, and less *acting*. It should never be forgotten, that the originals of witches are wretched old women. They should exhibit much of superstition, not so much vivacity, and have, in great measure, no more than a common appearance. This is evidently what SHAKESPEAR conceived of them; and he, no doubt, had an opportunity of drawing from the life. Thus, Banquo:

> I' th' name of truth,
> Are ye fantastical, or that, indeed,
> Which outwardly ye show?

THE PURSE, OR THE BENEVOLENT TAR.

Macbeth was followed by a thing of very singular complexion. Mr. Woodham was introduced, with the preface of an apology, to do, we scarcely know what: however, his *Galley Slave* was well sung. If we could reconcile ourselves to Mr. Jefferson's wriggle, all might be well.

TO THE BENEVOLENT TAR.

> Ah! JEFFERSON, why so much wit would you make
> To consist, my dear lad, in a wriggle and shake?
> Away with the trick, and your vein, never doubt it,
> Would flow through the scene just as comic without it;
> But if, fond of shaking, at precepts you scoff,
> Shake a good shake, at once, man! and shake the thing off.

Mr. CENSOR,

You are *All in the Wrong* about *Hamlet*'s question to *Horatio;* and I am about to put the matter beyond debate. DETECTOR, in the *United States' Gazette*, talks of reading "with attention the whole passage of Shakespeare, in which this interrogation is comprised:" this, no doubt, is much; but I have done a great deal more. I have read, once or twice in my life, the whole play, even to the *Dramatis Personæ*, which, with a great deal beside, seems to have escaped DETECTOR, "quite, and clean."

Sir, if I were to form my judgment from the passage in question only, I confess that I should never be able to understand the words—

Did not you speak to it,

in any other sense than an inquiry whether the *Ghost* were not *spoken* to; and of course I should look at "you," as used in a sense indefinite and plural. But, in a former scene, I find evidence that throws a new light upon the whole matter. When the *Ghost* first enters, *Bernardo* and *Marcellus*, from whom DETECTOR has thought proper to take their commissions, are not so much cowed by the 'grandeur of living majesty, enveloping a spirit, as by their want of *latin;* a deficiency nothing extraordinary in Scandinavian soldiers. Sir, it is not with reference to the pleasant "terms of some familiarity," on which *Horatio* lived with the "royal Dane," but because of that which he enjoyed with *Propria quæ maribus*, that they leave to him the task of speaking to the king; for, who the deuce ever dreamed of addressing a ghost but with *hic, hæc, hoc?*

Thou art a scholar; speak to it Horatio.

Now, as *Hamlet* seems to have known enough of *Horatio* to be at least acquainted with his better education, what can be more absurd than to entertain the faintest suspicion that he would ask *Bernardo* and *Marcellus* whether they had done that which he knew they dare not, for their ears? No, Sir; he looks to *Horatio*, whom, I beg you to recollect, elsewhere boasts, on this very account, (as I doubt not but some of the possessors of a "perfect knowledge of the bard of Avon" are convinced) that he is

—More an antique Roman than a Dane,

as the only fit man of the trio, to cope with a ghost. Why, Sir, had these "common soldiers" presumed to gabble their High-dutch to the "Majesty of buried Denmark," I make no question but they had been whisked, "incontinently," over

— the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base, into the sea.

Nay, Sir, what was it that actually happened? Do you not read that, when even Horatio himself did "speak to it" (owing, as I am intimately persuaded, to some *false concord*)

its gestures were such, that Marcellus tells us "it is offended," and Bernardo, "see! it stalks away;" but when, in the emergency, Marcellus does put in a word, why, at the very moment, "*exit ghost!*"

You see, Mr. Censor, what it is to write without having read enough to render you "capable of judging;" and, moreover, what it is, to "both read and judge to very little purpose!"

As to the *conclusive* argument, drawn from Mr. Fennell's own practice, on other occasions, I am not so entirely agreed with DETECTOR. It reminds me, a little, of that good maxim in law, that a man shall not be allowed the benefit of his own fraud. And, for the sweeping one, founded on Mr. F.'s "perfect knowledge," I presume that, as is hinted in the epilogue of the *Revenge*, "the proof o' th' pudding is in the eating."

I am, Sir, Your most humble servant,

PROOF POSITIVE.

MR. CENSOR,

I CONGRATULATE you on the accession of a fellow-labourer in the theatrical vineyard, and not one, but several. We shall soon have half the letters of the alphabet. We have M, and P, and H, and Y; but I wish I could discover among them any traces of our old and valuable acquaintance, ABC! I take M, to be of the *witty* if not *wicked* quatuorvirate, from what appears in the perspicuous advertisement lately issued in the *Repository*, and which, as you seem to have occupied some portion of the writer's thoughts, I the more willingly subjoin: "The "*Editor* ackowledges the receipt of 'M.'s polite note, &c. He "would also suggest to HIM the propriety of still continuing that no- "tice, as CRITICISMS on theatrical representations should be the vo- "luntary efforts of CIRCUMSPECTION, and NOT THAT WHICH ARISES "from *pecuniary* gratification, as IT is the acknowledged situation of "the *Censor*, who depends upon the publication of so many weekly "pages of criticism for *support;* and who either notices the perfor- "mances in gross terms of *adulation* of one party, or tramples under "foot, without respect to the *naked* goddess, the other." As all this is very *clear*, very *knowing*, and very *pungent*, I shall waste no comment upon it, but hasten to what may require a little more elucidation.

Sir, I think it will become you to welcome with particular attention the first appearance of so promising a critic as P, who, it seems, is to figure in the *Repository, or Ladies' Weekly Museum*. His exordium is remarkably fine: "Experience has proved, from *a remote age of* antiquity, that no profession has more ambitious votaries, and fewer that never succeed in it, than the stage." Perhaps you imagine, sir, that P. designs to say, *There is no profession as the stage, in which so few fail of success?* Quite the reverse. But I must refer you to the argument itself, which if you should not happen to understand, it will not be *my* fault.

To speak modestly of ourselves is so worthy a practice, that it is scarcely to be blamed, even in its excess; but if a blameable excess be possible, P. has certainly fallen into this "amiable weakness." He commences critic with the following ingenuous, initial paragraph: "The "respective performers acquitted themselves *as customary—some* per- "fectly to the satisfaction of the *audience*, and *some* only to *our dull ac-* "*quiescence*"!! But P. has not allowed me to devote a moment to the admiration he excites; my eye is immediately caught by the next sentence: "Mr. Wood and *Tangent* are intimate friends, are familiarly adapted to each other." This friendship must be comparable only with the Loves of the Triangles! Sir, this is all friendly and familiar; but, presently, dan P. takes a flight, and leaves your correspondent staring! Mr. M'Kenzie—"he accomplished a removal of the various difficulties "of the passions, incumbent on that character."—*Alas, my pretty sonata! what does all this mean?*

Well, Sir, P. proceeds to tell us, that "queen Elizabeth has been "represented as the *harbinger* of truth and justice. Her valour and "wisdom *was* never questioned; but regarding the fate of the injured "queen of Scotland, and the inflexible rigor of Elizabeth, we turn "away with indignation at the *odious review*, and treacherous incon- "sistency of her conduct."—But all this will never disconcert those 'Who do not know but Bohemia may be an island in the Atlantic 'ocean.' What does P. mean by his "words that require a *forcible* "accent?" Whisper in his ear, that there are words which require to be used in their proper place. Poor Mrs. Wignell! or "Wignelll," as P. sometimes has it—"Mrs. Wignell personated Mary with that "dignity and resignation suited to *her* unfortunate situation." Oh! for A B C.—*Beaumacharis* is a neat anagram of *Beaumarchais*, in the happiest style of the tortured press.

I could enlarge in praise of P's gallantry, and the occasion, when he tells us that "Mrs. Wood played the page handsomely;" but alas! my brain is racked by the wonderful enigma that concludes this precious critique: "Mr. Wood and count Amalviva are nearly CON- "NECTED TO—hold the mirror up to *nature!*"—I would give a ducat, and my old wig, for an explanation!

Upon the whole, Sir, I could say to P, in language with which, because it is his own, I think he could not be displeased, that "he "has acquired a consummate knowledge of the art of *stuttering*, and "he has our felicitations THEREFOR; but he certainly gives more "frequent exercise to it than there is absolute occasion" [for]. "This "is the only FAULT to be PREFERRED against our COMIC friend" He "receives our PROPITIOUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS for the "unwearied pains which he takes to make us perfectly content with "the manner in which he executes the characters he assumes;"— "and we desire him not to deviate from an orbit wherein he can and "does excel."—"It is unnecessary to say more; we believe it has "CLAIMED a just approbation."

Mr. Censor, after meeting with a *bonne bouche* like this, of which I have endeavoured to give you a taste, I could not refrain from turning over the remaining passages of the *Repository*, in which I have not been disappointed of further gratification. There is a piece of *original* poetry, abounding with *original* ideas. Sir, it must be allowed to be a *bad breath*—

" Why comes that breath with fervent sigh,
" And makes the maiden weep!"

What a wretch of a lover is here *hypothetized:*

" Or has her lover ever fail'd
" To wish her wear a smile?"

But the following is melancholy:——

" Alas! the *brinny* water tells
" A secret long confin'd—
" A breast where anguish, *sporting*, dwells,
" With passions all refin'd."

Then, the scene brightens:——

" Can this be true, that her I love
" Approves my ardent flame!"

In other parts of this delectable *Repository*, I am cheered or saddened by "compliments *effusing* from the distresses of impoverished orphans," or poetry of which I am told, that "To the present season *it comes peculiarly applicable.*" I should like to know what is meant by "so chaste and modest a subject as a female affords!" "Harkee," Mr. Censor! recommend the *Repository* to the ladies of your acquaintance; but never tell them to make it their *primer*. It would but indifferently aid them to do what Milton wishes——"rightly spell."

If any inquiries should be made at your Office, respecting the author of this letter, you may tell, in confidence, to those whom it shall concern, that it is from their best, but neglected friend,

HORNBOOK.

TO READERS AND CORRESPONDENTS.

We have received several critiques on Mr. Fennell's performance, so fulsome, and so far from truth, that the mildest Censor existing would revolt at them. Sensible of the extraordinary talents of that gentleman, we have been as lavish of praise upon him as was at all consistent with justice. A critic, in the United States Gazette of Tuesday last, not satisfied with this, will not suffer Mr. F. to have any failing, and attempts to defend him in palpable errors. "The taste, judgment, and talents of that great tragedian," says he, "never shone with higher lustre [than in Hamlet]. For a time we thought that criticism would be silent, or would break forth only in pæans of eulogy."

If we were inclined, as the same writer observes, to see every thing with a microscopic eye, how many *trifles* might we not have pointed out? But we conceive it to be important to notice innovations, which prove the actor to be more employed in fishing for minnows than attending to objects of higher import to his fame. When we noticed the speech of *Hamlet*, addressed to *Horatio*,

Did *you* not speak to it?

We expressed a doubt of the propriety of the new reading (for *new* it certainly is, to any person unacquainted with Mr. Fennell's acting); and we did not deem it of sufficient importance to think of longer.

But, since DETECTOR has taken up the cudgels, we must defend ourselves. *Bernardo* and *Marcellus*, says DETECTOR, were common soldiers. For the truth of this passage we refer our readers to the *Dramatis Personæ*, prefixed to every edition of Shakespear: "*Marcellus* and *Bernardo*, Officers." If more evidence be wanting, a perusal of the first scene will afford it. So much for DETECTOR's "common soldiers, who had most likely never spoken to the king during his life-time." *Horatio*, says DETECTOR, had been, "*no doubt*, intimate in the palace, and on terms of some familiarity even with the king." For this let *Horatio* himself speak. (*Act* i, *Scene* 2.)

I saw him *once*, he was a goodly king.

Seeing him once (perhaps at a review) did not surely argue much familiarity. Upon due consideration, we find the whole of DETECTOR's observations as little to the purpose as the *new* reading; but he will oblige us by continuing to scrutinize our labours.

Master Hornbook, a young gentleman of the same family as the New-York Critic, has requested permission to add his efforts to those of the Theatrical Censor. We shall therefore assign to him the task of answering the 'multitudinous' critics which have started against us. This stripling, who has not yet attained his twelfth year, seems to have an eye principally to the *Ladies' Repository;* and as he discovers a genius well adapted to cope with the *Subscription Author's Club*, we trust those gentlemen will receive a little tickling from him. N. B. This club was formed by the *one hundred dollars* subscribed to *write down* The Theatrical Censor. Each member is to produce something *weekly* concerning the theatre; for which he receives a pint of beer and a pipe of tobacco. No segars are used in the club-room, as the members affect the manners of English critics, who smoke with pipes. A sketch of their club-room, with capital likenesses of the members, was given us last week by Master Hornbook, which is now in the hands of the engraver, and will appear in No. XI.

☞ Our correspondents, whose favors we are obliged to postpone, and the public in general, are respectfully informed, that No. XI will appear on Thursday next.

The price of this work is 50 cents for four numbers. To be had at No. 42, Walnut-street, and at Mr. Phillips's Circulating Library, south Fourth-street. Communications, and orders from the country, received at the former place.